

## 4. Peace negotiations in Asia

- There were 12 negotiating processes in Asia in 2019, representing about one fifth of the total number of cases around the world.
- The peace talks between the US government and the Taliban insurgency made significant progress, although President Trump cancelled the signing of the peace agreement that had been planned for August.
- Afghan women's organisations unsuccessfully asked to participate significantly in the peace negotiations and complained that their rights were not a subject of discussion with the Taliban insurgency.
- The peace process in Mindanao centred on the institutional development of the new regional framework and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of the MILF.
- Although the leaders of the US and North Korea had two meetings during the year, the negotiating process was stalled for most of it.
- Negotiations shut down in southern Thailand between the government and MARA Patani, an umbrella organisation for several insurgent groups, but Bangkok sought to resume talks with the BRN, the main armed group in the southern part of the country.
- No formal progress was made in the peace process in Myanmar, but several meetings were held between the Government and the various insurgent groups.

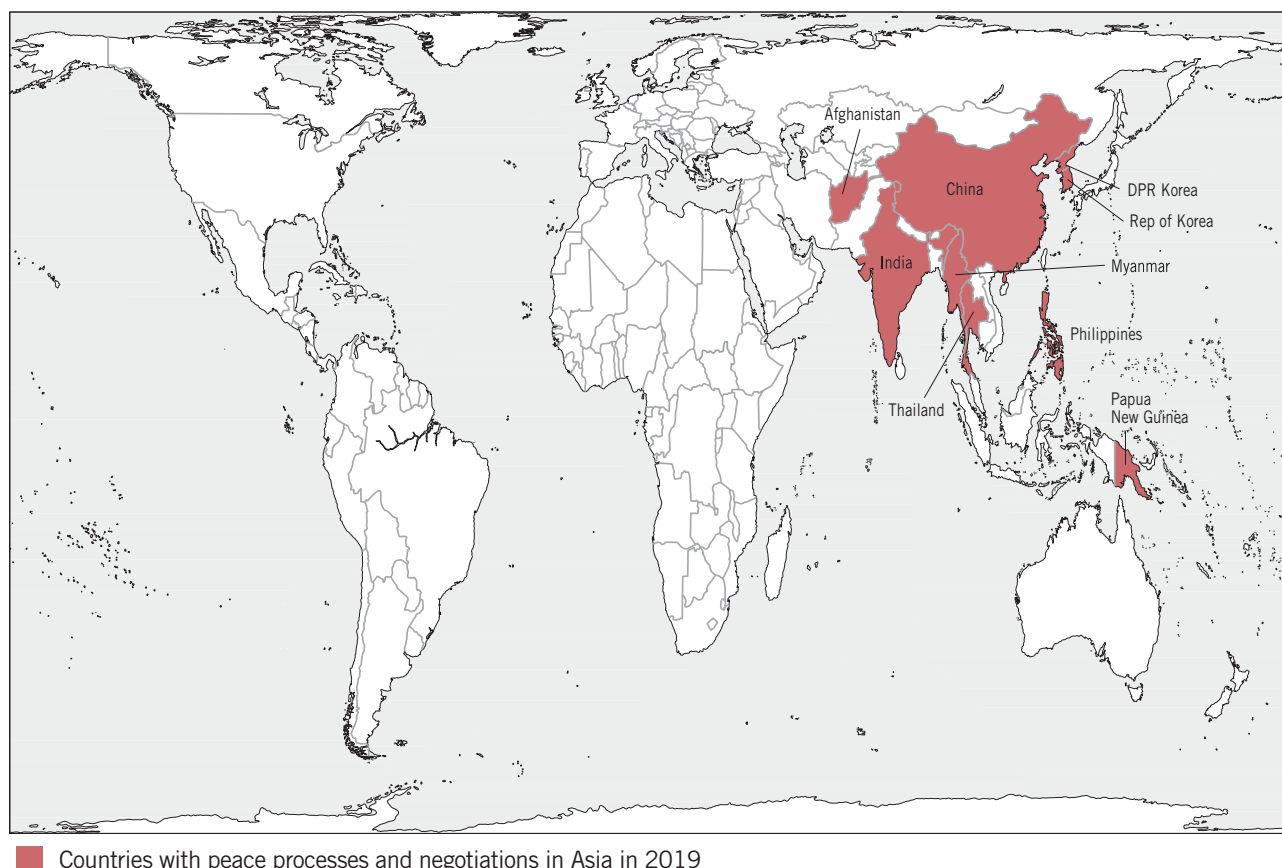
This chapter provides an analysis of the main peace processes and negotiations in Asia in 2019, both the general characteristics and trends of the negotiations and the development of each case on the continent throughout the year, including references to the gender, peace and security agenda. In addition, at the beginning of the chapter there is a map identifying the countries in Asia that hosted peace negotiations during 2019.

Table 4.1. Summary of peace processes and negotiations in Asia in 2019

Peace processes and negotiations	Negotiating actors	Third parties
<b>Afghanistan</b>	Government, Taliban insurgents, USA	Pakistan, China, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Germany, Norway, UN
China (Tibet)	China, Tibetan government-in-exile	--
<b>DPR Korea – Republic of Korea</b>	North Korea, South Korea	--
<b>DPR Korea – USA</b>	North Korea, USA	--
India (Assam)	Government, ULFA-PTF, NDFB-P, NDFB-RD	--
<b>India (Nagaland)</b>	Indian government, NSCN-IM, NNPG: GPRN/NSCN (Kitovi Zhimomi), NNC, FGN, NSCN(R), NPGN (Non-Accord) and NNC/GDRN/NA, ZUF	--
<b>Myanmar</b>	Government; armed groups that have signed the ceasefire agreement (NCA): DKBA, RCSS/SSA-South, CNF, KNU, KNLAPC, ALP, PNLO, ABSDF, NMSP and LDU; armed groups not part of the NCA: UWSP, NDAA, SSPP/SSA-N, KNPP, NSCN-K, KIA, AA, TNLA, MNDAA	China
<b>Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)</b>	Government, Autonomous Region of Bougainville	UN, Conciliation Resources
<b>Philippines (MILF)</b>	Government, MILF	Malaysia, International Contact Group, Third Party Monitoring Team, International Monitoring Team, Independent Decommissioning Body
<b>Philippines (MNLF)</b>	Government, MNLF (faction led by Nur Misuari)	--
<b>Philippines (NDF)</b>	Government, NDF (umbrella organisation of different communist organisations, among them the Communist Party of the Philippines, which is the political arm of the NPA)	Norway
<b>Thailand (south)</b>	Government, MARA Patani (umbrella organisation representing several armed groups)	Malaysia

The peace negotiations in bold type are described in the chapter.  
 -- There are no third parties or no public proof of their existence.

Map 4.1. Peace negotiations in Asia in 2019



## 4.1 Negotiations in 2019: regional trends

**Twelve negotiating processes** were reported in **Asia** in 2019, which represents practically a quarter of the total cases around the world. Since the previous year, a new negotiating process was identified between the government of Papua New Guinea and the government of the Bougainville region after the self-determination referendum held on the island in late 2019 where more than 98% of the population voted for independence. The 2001 peace agreement provided for the postponement of a non-binding referendum for the government of Papua New Guinea, so that both governments must negotiate to agree on a proposal that is likely to be put to a vote in the Parliament of Papua New Guinea in a period of time that has yet to be determined. Several negotiations in Asia were linked to active armed conflicts, such as in Afghanistan, the Philippines (NDF), Myanmar and Thailand (south), but most were framed in contexts of socio-political tension, such as in China (Tibet), North Korea-South Korea, North Korea-USA, India (Assam) and India (Nagaland), or they featured armed groups that were no longer actively fighting against the government, such as the MILF and the MNLF in the Philippines. Almost half the negotiations in Asia took place in South-east Asia, while there were three negotiating processes

in South Asia, another three in East Asia and finally another in Oceania. No peace processes were reported in Central Asia.

Two thirds of the negotiating processes were linked to issues of self-determination, independence, autonomy, territorial and constitutional issues and recognition of the identity of various national minorities. Such cases include those in the Philippines (MILF and MNLF), China (Tibet), India (Assam and Nagaland), Myanmar, Papua New Guinea (Bougainville) and Thailand (south). Two of the remaining four cases were mainly focused on the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and the final two, in Afghanistan and the Philippines (NDF), centred on structural and systemic reforms in the political, social, religious and military spheres.

While almost all of the negotiations were internal in **nature**, they were interstate in the cases of North Korea and the US and North Korea and South Korea. In China, talks are held between the Chinese government and the Tibetan government-in-exile, which is based in a neighbouring country (India).<sup>1</sup> In addition, several other negotiating processes had a clearly international

1. On several occasions Beijing has indicated that it does not recognise the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), commonly known as the Tibetan government-in-exile, so in previous negotiations special envoys of the Dalai Lama interacted directly with Beijing.

dimension, not only because of the participation of foreign third parties or because of the regional impacts of the conflicts, but because sometimes the leadership (or certain leaders) of the armed groups reside abroad or also because much of the negotiations took place outside the country.

The vast majority of the **actors participating in the negotiations** were governments and armed groups (or their political representatives), but in a quarter of the cases the talks took place between governments, either between sovereign states (North Korea and the USA and North Korea and South Korea) or between national and regional governments (Papua New Guinea and Bougainville or China and Tibet), although it should also be noted that in Mindanao, the Philippine government and the Bangsamoro Transitional Authority of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao created a specific body to negotiate and resolve disputes related to the distribution of powers. All negotiations involved the governments of the countries where the peace process was taking place, and in some cases with decisive participation by the highest authorities in the country, as was the case with President Donald Trump in Afghanistan and North Korea, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in the three negotiating processes hosted by the Philippines and Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in in the inter-Korean negotiations. In some cases, the governments in question had an institutional framework specifically designed to deal with the negotiating processes and peace policies as a whole, such as in Afghanistan, through the High Peace Council; the Philippines, through the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Processes; Myanmar, through the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre, the Peace Commission and the Secretariat of Peace; and South Korea, through the Ministry of Unification.

Various **armed groups** negotiated directly, like the MILF and the MNLF in the Philippines, the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, the NSCN-IM in India, the KNPP and the KIA in Myanmar and, according to some sources, the BRN in southern Thailand, or through political organisations representing them, such as in the Philippines, as Manila has negotiated since the mid-1980s with the National Democratic Front (NDF), an organisation that unites different communist groups, including the Philippine Communist Party, whose armed wing is the NPA. In other cases, the negotiations took place between governments and umbrella organisations that group together and represent several armed groups, such as MARA Patani in Thailand, which unites five armed groups; the Naga National Political Groups (NNPG) in Nagaland, which brings together seven insurgent organisations; and the UNFC and the Northern Alliance and Brotherhood Alliance in Myanmar (these

last two unite armed organisations that have not signed the national ceasefire agreement).

Although it is not exclusively typical of Asia, it should be noted that in many cases there was a **remarkable variety of negotiating processes and formats** in the same country. For example, direct negotiations between the US government and the Taliban in Qatar, which were both formal and informal, were held alongside exploratory talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban and intra-organisational dialogue taking place mainly during the National Peace Consultative Loya Jirga and the Intra-Afghan Peace Conference in 2019. In India (Nagaland), the national government negotiated bilaterally with both the NSCN-IM and the insurgent group coordinator NNPG, while at the same time maintaining an exploratory dialogue with Naga tribes and non-Naga communities. In the process involving the MILF in the Philippines, there were direct negotiations between the implementation panels of both parties, but also contacts between the

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MILF and the MNLF to find common ground between both groups and even achieve the possible harmonisation of both negotiating processes (and their respective resulting peace agreements). Negotiations were also held within the Bangsamoro Transitional Authority (where the MILF and the government appointed members at almost equal levels) and between it and the central government regarding power sharing and other disputes that may arise during the institutional development of the new autonomous authority in Mindanao. In another negotiating process taking place in the Philippines, which features the state and the NDF, the Duterte administration maintained official and formal negotiations with the NDF leadership in a process that dates back to the 1980s and has been facilitated by Norway in recent years, while at the same time initiating “localised peace talks” with units and regional commanders of the NPA, which according to some critics are trying to demobilise the NPA fighters and create strategic dissension between the NDF leaders exiled in the Netherlands and the military command of the NPA on the ground. In Thailand, the government maintained its formal commitment to negotiations with MARA Patani, facilitated by Malaysia, but at the same time it was revealed that Bangkok was trying to enter into direct negotiations with the BRN, the main armed group in the southern part of the country. Finally, the Burmese government held meetings with armed groups that had signed the national ceasefire agreement (NCA), although there were no formal meetings of the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong; as well as with groups that had not joined the NCA, both in a bilateral format (with the KIA or KNPP, for example), and through insurgent group coordinating bodies such as the Northern Alliance and the Brotherhood Alliance

(some armed groups are part of both). In the two cases linked to the Korean peninsula, the negotiations consisted mainly of presidential summits and meetings (some sporadic, others more scheduled and frequent) in order to build trust between the parties and implement the promises made during the presidential summits.

Half the negotiations analysed in Asia the participation of **third parties**, making it the continent with the highest percentage of direct and bilateral negotiations between the parties. The cases in which there was some kind of facilitation of the dialogue by third parties were Afghanistan, the Philippines (MILF), the Philippines (NDF), Myanmar, Papua New Guinea (Bougainville) and Thailand (south), although the degree of internationalisation and complexity of the intermediation structures was very different among those cases. In some instances, the dialogue was facilitated by a single actor, such as Norway in the Philippines (NDF), Malaysia in southern Thailand and China in Myanmar, while in others the mediation space for dialogue was more complex. The high degree of internationalisation of the peace processes in Mindanao and Afghanistan should be noted. In addition to official mediation by the government of Malaysia, the peace process in the Philippines (MILF) enjoys four other international support structures: the International Monitoring Team, in which the EU participates, along with countries such as Malaysia, Libya, Brunei, Japan and Norway; the Third Party Monitoring Team, responsible for overseeing implementation of the agreements signed between the MILF and Manila; the International Decommissioning Body, composed of Turkey, Norway, Brunei and the Philippines; and, finally, the International Contact Group, made up of four states (Japan, the United Kingdom, Turkey and Saudi Arabia) and four international NGOs (Muhammadiyah, the Asia Foundation, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and Conciliation Resources), though since the transformation of the government's and the MILF's negotiating panels into teams to implement the peace agreements, the functions of this dialogue support structure have been reformulated and somewhat diluted. In Afghanistan, prominent roles were played by UNAMA, with its mandate to facilitate the UN dialogue, and Qatar, a country where a Taliban insurgency office was established a few years ago and which in recent years has hosted several meetings between the Taliban and the US government. Other intermediary initiatives that illustrated the international community's interest and intervention in Afghanistan included the Intra-Afghan Dialogue, which held two massive events in 2019, a jirga and a peace conference; the "Moscow format"; and the establishment of negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban, an effort in which countries such as Germany or Norway played a specific role.

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***The Afghan government announced that women would be included in the negotiating team in future peace negotiations with the Taliban, who in turn announced that their delegation in Qatar would include women***

In some cases, the role played by third parties was more formal and official, as happened with Norway regarding the negotiations between the Philippine Government and the NDF; with Malaysia regarding negotiations between Manila and the MILF and between the Thai government and the insurgency operating in southern Thailand; and with Qatar in the official negotiations already under way between the US administration

and the Taliban. In other cases, talks were facilitated more indirectly, such as by the UN and the international NGO Conciliation Resources in their work between the governments of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville through the Post-Referendum Planning Taskforce, or more informally, as is the case with China regarding some Burmese insurgent groups from Shan State or the Northern Alliance, or even the role that South Korean President Moon Jae-in has sometimes played in talks between North Korea and the United States. As also happens on other continents, on several occasions (in fact, in almost half the cases) the states neighbouring the country where the negotiating process took place played some role in facilitating it. This probably denotes a certain interest in preserving regional stability and in thereby preventing the crisis that has triggered the negotiations from expanding beyond the confines of the country. This happened in Pakistan with respect to Afghanistan, a country with which it has always shared a porous border in Pashtun-majority areas; in China with respect to Myanmar, especially regarding the groups operating in the border regions between Myanmar and China; in Malaysia with respect to the Philippines (MILF) and Thailand (south); and in South Korea, with President Moon Jae-in's recent preponderant role in finding common ground and holding presidential summits between the United States and North Korea. States that took on prominent roles included Norway, which was involved in mediation between the Philippine Government and the NDF, in the exploratory talks between Kabul and the Taliban and in the formation of the International Decommissioning Body and the International Monitoring Team; and Malaysia, which is the official facilitator of the negotiations between the Philippines and the MILF and between the Thai government and the insurgency in southern Thailand. The efforts made by many local NGOs to build trust and facilitate dialogue between negotiating parties were joined by international NGOs in some cases, such as Conciliation Resources in Mindanao (together with three other international NGOs), Papua New Guinea, the Berghof Foundation and the Asia Foundation in Thailand.

In comparative terms, **intergovernmental organisations'** lack of initiative in mediating and facilitating talks and in observing and verifying the implementation

of agreements and cessation of hostilities is striking. The United Nations only exercised some of the aforementioned functions in Afghanistan through UNAMA and, more indirectly, in facilitating and providing technical support to the Post-Referendum Planning Taskforce, a working group in which the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government must negotiate the political status of Bougainville after the independence referendum held in 2019. The EU participated indirectly in the peace process in Mindanao through the International Monitoring Team, which oversees the ceasefire between the Philippine government and the MILF. Another organisation that has historically played an important role in Mindanao is the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which first facilitated the negotiations that led to the signing of the 1996 peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF, recognised by the OIC as the legitimate representative of the Moro people, later facilitated talks on the full implementation of the aforementioned agreement and finally sponsored cooperation between the MNLF and the MILF, promoting the coordination and convergence of both negotiating processes. However, although Nur Misuari repeatedly asked for the OIC to play a bigger role in his talks with the state in 2019, lately the OIC has been playing a less proactive role than in previous years because the majority factions of the MNLF have accepted the peace agreement between the government and the MILF as fact and have even been integrated into the resulting structures.

There was no global or structural **trend in the peace negotiations** during the year, with most processes deadlocked or even suffering a setback in general terms. However, concrete progress was made in almost all contexts. The two places where there was a more positive trend in the peace process overall were Afghanistan and the Philippines (MILF). In Afghanistan, there was such a breakthrough in the formal negotiations between the US government and the Taliban that an agreement was almost signed at Camp David in September before it was finally cancelled by Donald Trump. Similarly, there was significant progress both in the exploratory phase of possible negotiations between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban and in the Intra-Afghan Dialogue. In the southern Philippines, approval of the referendum on the Bangsamoro Organic Law initiated a new phase of the peace process centred on the disarmament of the MILF and especially on the institutional development of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, temporarily governed by the leader of the MILF. Other cases enjoyed partial progress, such as the two summits held by Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un in Hanoi and in the North Korean part of the Demilitarised Zone; the direct meetings (up to six) between the Philippine president and the leader and founder of the MNLF, Nur Misuari, to resume talks with the group; the resumption of negotiations between Manila and the NDF after many months of deadlock; the many meetings between the

government of Myanmar and armed groups that had signed the national ceasefire agreement, as well as some that had not; the predisposition to dialogue shown by the governments of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville after the independence referendum; and the start of direct talks between the Thai government and the main armed group in southern Thailand.

Finally, with regard to the **gender, peace and security agenda** and women's participation in peace negotiations in Asia, in most cases there was no significant presence of women in the negotiations, nor was the gender perspective included in the substantive agenda of the peace processes. Yet in some cases, notable progress was made over previous years. In Afghanistan, for example, the Government announced the inclusion of three women (out of a total of 12 members) in the negotiating team in future peace talks, while the Taliban announced that their delegation in Qatar would include women. In addition, a "Group of Friends of the Women in Afghanistan" was formed, consisting of representatives from 20 countries to guarantee the rights of women in possible negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban. In Myanmar, UN Women also promoted different meetings to favour the implementation of Resolution 1325 and the women, peace and security agenda. In Papua New Guinea, the president of the Autonomous Bougainville Government guaranteed that women would participate in the team that must negotiate the political status of the island of Bougainville with the central government. In other contexts, women's organisations played an important advocacy role and applied pressure for the beginning, continuation and resumption of dialogue, leading demonstrations, holding discussion forums, carrying out awareness-raising projects and presenting proposals to the negotiating parties.

## 4.2. Case study analysis

### East Asia

DPR Korea – Republic of Korea	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	North Korea, South Korea
<b>Third parties</b>	--
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Panmunjom Declaration (April 2018)

#### Summary:

Although the high points of the negotiations between North Korea and South Korea were the presidential summits held in the 21st century (2000, 2007 and 2018), there have been attempts at rapprochement to move forward on the path of reunification and cooperation since the 1970s. Thus, in 1972, both countries signed the North-South Korea Joint Statement, outlining some measures for reunification and reducing the arms race, among other issues. In late 1991, both countries signed the Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation; a few weeks later, they signed the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. The former,



which was achieved after five rounds of negotiations begun in September 1990 between the prime ministers of both countries, was considered a historic agreement and a turning point in the relationship between both countries by much of the international community, as it included commitments to mutual non-aggression, respect for the political and economic systems of each country, peaceful conflict resolution, economic cooperation and the promotion of measures for the reunification of both countries. However, the measures included in the agreement were not fully implemented, partly because of the tensions generated by the North Korean weapons programme. In 1994, former US President Jimmy Carter exercised his good offices between the leaders of both countries to contain the crisis generated by the progress made in the programme and Pyongyang's decision not to allow inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency and to abandon the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In the 21st century, under a policy of rapprochement with North Korea (called the Sun Policy) promoted by Kim Dae-jun and continued by his successor, Roh Moon-hyun, in 2000 and 2007 Pyongyang hosted the first two presidential summits since the end of the Korean War, in which both countries again pledged to boost cooperation to move towards greater stability and the eventual reunification of the Korean peninsula.

**The process of dialogue and rapprochement between North Korea and South Korea remained relatively stagnant compared to the previous year, in which up to three summits were held between the leaders of both countries and several agreements were made and measures were taken to promote trust.** Negotiations between both governments were virtually non-existent throughout the year and the role of facilitating the dialogue between North Korea and the United States that South Korean President Moon Jae-in had sought and exercised was seriously compromised by the failure of the summit that US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un held in Hanoi in February. Early in the year, the South Korean government was very active in the trilateral preparatory meetings for the summit, which were mainly held in Stockholm. Along the same lines, in his New Year address, Kim Jong-un publicly spoke of his desire to keep on promoting shared and cooperative projects with South Korea, as well as to continue the presidential negotiations and summits that took place in 2018. However, **the North Korean government's position regarding the inter-Korean talks changed significantly after the Hanoi summit**, in which Pyongyang sought an incremental negotiating system in which the US recognised and replicated concrete measures regarding its nuclear disarmament. According to the media, the US summit would have demanded the verifiable, irreversible and virtually complete inventory and dismantling of its infrastructure and weapons capabilities. Shortly after the abrupt end of that summit, North Korean officials stopped regularly attending weekly meetings at the liaison office between the two countries in the border town of Kaesong established the previous year to maintain fluid communication and boost negotiations between them. In addition, in May the

North Korean government decided not to participate in the commemoration of the first anniversary of the inter-Korean summit in Panmunjom. Nevertheless, in June, **Moon Jae-in made a formal appeal to North Korea to hold a presidential summit (the fourth since 2018) prior to President Donald Trump's visit to the country, but the proposal was rejected** by Pyongyang. However, Moon Jae-in did participate in the meeting that Trump and Kim Jong-un held on 30 June in the Demilitarised Zone to try to resume talks. Previously, the South Korean government had approved the shipment of 50,000 tonnes of rice to its neighbour through United Nations agencies in one of the largest humanitarian aid budget items in recent decades.

In August, **Moon Jae-in publicly declared that both countries can jointly organise the 2032 Olympic Games, as had already transpired in February, as well as to achieve peace and the reunification of both countries by 2045, during the centenary of the liberation of both countries after the Second World War.** Shortly thereafter, on the occasion of his participation in the UN General Assembly in September, the South Korean president continued to work on his road map for the normalisation of relations in the Korean peninsula. First, he proposed turning the current Demilitarised Zone into an International Peace Zone. Second, he presented the three principles that should guide the negotiations: zero tolerance for war, mutual security guarantees between North Korea and South Korea and a commitment to shared prosperity. Meanwhile, the North Korean government stated on several occasions that it would not hold any kind of dialogue with South Korea and that in the event that negotiations were resumed they would be exclusively bilateral between North Korea and the United States. Pyongyang also explicitly asked Seoul not to interfere in its negotiations with Washington. According to some analysts, Moon Jae-in's efforts in recent years for North Korea and the US to redirect their diplomatic relations and establish a sustained dialogue were necessary and recognised by both parties, but in the current scenario, in which North Korea and the US already have direct and continuous communication, Pyongyang believes that it can obtain greater results from bilateral negotiations with the US than from the participation or facilitation of South Korea. According to these analysts, the North Korean government hoped that Moon Jae-in would have interceded more decisively so that the US government would offer greater flexibility in its sanctions policy at the Hanoi summit.

Moreover, **South Korea's facilitating role in the negotiations between North Korea and the United States was also jeopardised to some extent by the tensions that emerged between the Trump administration and the South Korean government.** According to some analysts, the South Korean government believes that the US negotiating strategy should take a more incremental approach and make concessions (mainly in

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the area of sanctions) in a more gradual and phased denuclearisation of North Korea. However, given a strictly bilateral negotiating framework between North Korea and the US, there are certain fears within the South Korean government that the latter may focus exclusively on the issue of intercontinental ballistic missiles and on banning new nuclear tests, thereby allowing Pyongyang to retain much of its nuclear arsenal. The US government expressed its discomfort to Seoul, believing that it had been too empathetic and receptive to North Korea's demands regarding its sanctions policy, that it had proposed the resumption of inter-Korean economic projects a few days before the Hanoi summit and that it had pressured North Korean defectors living in South Korea not to testify against the North Korean regime.

#### DPR Korea – USA

**Negotiating actors** North Korea, USA

**Third parties** --

**Relevant agreements** Singapore Statement (June 2018)

#### Summary:

The US and other countries of the international community began to express their concern about the North Korean nuclear programme in the early 1980s, but the tensions that it produced were mainly channelled through several bilateral or multilateral agreements: in 1985, Korea North ratified the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; in 1991 the US announced the withdrawal of about 100 South Korean warheads under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START); and in 1992 North Korea and South Korea signed the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, in which both countries pledged not to produce, store, test or deploy nuclear weapons and to allow verification through inspections. Nevertheless, there was a major diplomatic crisis in 1993 due to Pyongyang's decision not to allow inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and to pull out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, though it eventually stayed its hand after the talks it held with the United States and the United Nations. After a trip to the Korean peninsula by former President Jimmy Carter in 1994, in which he met with North Korean leader Kim Il-sung to resolve diplomatic tensions and seek rapprochement, the US and North Korean governments signed an agreement in Geneva (known as the Agreed Framework) in which, among other things, Pyongyang promised to freeze its nuclear programme in exchange for aid and the relaxation of international sanctions. George W. Bush's inauguration as president of the United States led to a change in policy towards North Korea. Shortly after it was included in the so-called "Axis of Evil", Pyongyang expelled several IAEA inspectors, withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and announced that it already possessed nuclear weapons. In light of this new situation, six-party multilateral talks between North Korea, South Korea, the United States, Japan, China and Russia began in 2003. Though they led to some important agreements in 2005 and 2008, this negotiating format came to an end in 2009. Despite direct contact between North Korea and the US since then, including an agreement reached in 2012 in which Pyongyang committed to a moratorium on ballistic and nuclear tests, the tension between both countries rose after Kim Jong-un came to power in 2011 and the North Korean weapons programme

intensified. In mid-2018, Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump held a historic summit in Singapore where they addressed the normalisation of relations between both countries and the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

Although US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un held two meetings during the year, the negotiating process between both countries was stalled for most of the year. **The second summit between both presidents took place in Hanoi in February, but ended earlier than planned and without agreement regarding a third presidential summit.** According to several analysts, in that meeting neither party saw their expectations fulfilled. North Korea did not convince the United States to lift or ease the sanctions, while the promise to close the Yongbyon nuclear reactor, the largest in the entire country, was not enough in the eyes of the Trump administration, which demanded more decisive and verifiable measures of nuclear disarmament. Shortly before the summit, the US Armed Forces had warned that after the 2018 Singapore summit, the tension in the Demilitarised Zone had subsided and military provocations by North Korea had substantially diminished, but no significant progress was reported in the denuclearisation of the country. Despite the lack of concrete agreements, both parties recognised that personal relations between both leaders were very good. In the weeks prior to the Hanoi summit, there was probably the largest number of meetings between the parties all year, as well as progress in the implementation of the Singapore summit declaration of June 2018, the first in history between leaders of the US and North Korea. In his traditional end-of-the-year speech, Kim Jong-un confirmed that his country was not manufacturing or testing nuclear weapons and expressed his readiness to continue negotiations with the US and with South Korea. Thus, in addition to several conversations at the level of work teams that occurred since the beginning of the year, in mid-January a North Korean high-level delegation travelled to Washington to meet with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Days later, both sides met in Stockholm, with a South Korean delegation attending, while in early February, the US special representative for negotiations with North Korea, Stephen Biegun, travelled to Pyongyang to prepare for the Hanoi summit.

After the Hanoi summit, the negotiating process stalled. **Alongside the resumption of tests with short-range missiles and the use of more aggressive rhetoric regarding the annual joint military exercises between the US and South Korea, the North Korean government began to demand that the United States change its approach and attitude in the negotiations.** Previously, Kim Jong-un had already demanded greater flexibility in the US sanctions policy and had warned of the consequences of forcing the unilateral denuclearisation of his country. Shortly after the summit in Hanoi, Pyongyang already declared that it would allow the US until the end of the year to abandon its hostile policy and offer concrete,

tangible and acceptable measures for North Korea. Otherwise, Pyongyang would take a new path in its relations with the US, in a statement that most media outlets interpreted as a resumption of nuclear tests and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

**In June, after Donald Trump visited South Korea and sent a personal letter to Kim Jong-un, both leaders met in the North Korean part of the Demilitarised Zone, making Trump the first US president in office to set foot on North Korean soil.** At the meeting, both leaders promised to resume the negotiations and implement the agreements of the Singapore summit, focused on denuclearisation and peacebuilding on the Korean peninsula and the transformation of relations between the two countries. However, other than a personal letter that Kim Jong-un sent to Trump in August explaining his willingness to resume the talks and to implement a new approach to them, the high-level negotiations did not resume again during the year. In October, a technical-level work meeting was held between both parties in Stockholm, but the North Korean delegation left the meeting because it thought that the US had not relaxed its position. In November, the US declared that it was not challenged by the ultimatum brought by North Korea and said that it would postpone joint military exercises as a gesture of goodwill towards Pyongyang. In addition, some analysts believe that given the current domestic policy scene in the US, including the process of impeachment against Donald Trump, it is not in a position to make significant concessions to North Korea, which according to these same analysts would mainly happen in exchange for the partial withdrawal of sanctions and the offer of security guarantees for Pyongyang. North Korea considered the delay of the aforementioned military exercises insufficient and asked the US to stop carrying them out for good. It stressed the consequences of not respecting the 31 December deadline to obtain new concessions from the US and continued to make the progress of its arms programme public at the same time.

## Gender, peace and security

Some media outlets echoed the low presence (or visibility) of women at the summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un in Hanoi in February, but others stressed the importance of some women in the negotiations between the two countries, such as Allison Hooker, a specialist on Korea in the US National Security Council and according to some analysts a key person in the preparation of the summit; Choe Son-hui, the North Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs and the senior woman in the North Korean delegation, one of the main people responsible for bilateral relations with the US with previous diplomatic experience in organising visits to the country by former presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton; and Kim Yo-jong, a sister of Kim Jong-un and

**Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un met in the North Korean part of the Demilitarised Zone, making Trump the first US president in office to set foot on North Korean soil**

a key person in the approach between her brother and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who several analysts believe exerts a significant influence on the government's foreign policy decisions. However, their role in the respective governments and their participation in the aforementioned summits between Trump and Kim Jong-un was no guarantee that they would include women, peace and security issues on their substantive agenda.

## South Asia

Afghanistan	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, Taliban insurgents, USA
<b>Third parties</b>	Pakistan, China, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Germany, Norway, UN
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Bonn Agreement –Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions – (2001)

### Summary:

Afghanistan has been in a state of continuous armed conflict since 1979. The different parties have attempted to negotiate in all of the stages of the struggle. During the 1980s the UN worked to facilitate rapprochement between the US and the USSR. After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the United Nations again facilitated the process that led to the Bonn Agreement, which marked the beginning of the country's transition. In recent years the persistence of armed conflict and the inability to stop it using military means has led the Afghan and U.S. Governments to gradually reach out to the Taliban insurgency, a process that has not been without difficulties and has not passed the exploration and confidence building stages. Different international actors such as the UN and the German and Saudi Arabian Governments have played different roles in facilitating and bringing the parties together.

**The peace process in Afghanistan underwent a decisive year in which important progress and rapprochement took place, though no peace agreement was signed.** The peace process took place in various formats and tracks. First, **the negotiations between the US government and the Taliban, which acquired a formal character prior to their cancellation by the US in September, consisted of a total of nine rounds.** Second, the different attempts at intra-organisational dialogue led by both the government and other Afghan actors, sometimes with international support, did not bear fruit, but did result in several initiatives.

In January, the US government and the Taliban insurgency announced a framework agreement that began a negotiating process in line with the approaches that had occurred during 2018. After a meeting in Doha between US envoy of Afghan origin Zalmay Khalilzad and a Taliban delegation, it was announced that the draft agreement established that Afghanistan would no longer be used by terrorist groups and provided for a



commitment by the US to withdraw its troops from the country. During this meeting, it was announced that the Taliban's main negotiator would be Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. His appointment was perceived as a sign of the Taliban's commitment to the process, due to his rank, as second in the hierarchy of command, as well as his previous experience in exploratory meetings to initiate a peace process with the Afghan government. The fact that he had been released by Pakistan (he had been in custody since 2010) was also perceived as a change in the country's attitude toward the negotiations. Discussions in the different rounds of negotiations in Doha focused on the withdrawal of US troops; guarantees against terrorism; talks between the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan to reach a political agreement; and a lasting ceasefire. In April, the United Nations announced that it was lifting the travel bans on 11 Taliban leaders for an initial period of nine months for the sole purpose of allowing them to participate in the peace process.

**In August, it emerged that the parties had practically finalised the start of an agreement that established a schedule for US troops to withdraw from Afghanistan (possibly an initial withdrawal of 5,500 military personnel within 135 days) and the Taliban pledged to ensure that the country would not be used to plan terrorist attacks against the US, thereby formalising the agenda agreed in January.** The president of the United States had decided that the agreement should be signed at the presidential residence of Camp David, near Washington. The signing of the agreement revealed the internal differences in the US government, with supporters such as US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the US envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, the architect of the agreement, pitted against opponents such as National Security Advisor John Bolton, who supports a troop withdrawal without signing an agreement. The Taliban had been in favour of travelling to Washington as long as the agreement was announced previously, while Trump wanted to sign the agreement at Camp David to present himself as the architect of the pact. Washington also decided to invite the Afghan president to the signing ceremony, despite Taliban opposition. Other aspects that hindered the final agreement included the potential release of thousands of Taliban prisoners in Afghanistan, since the Afghan government thought that it had not been consulted in this regard and only agreed in exchange for a ceasefire, which the Taliban were reluctant to accept. **Unexpectedly, however, President Trump cancelled the signing of the agreement in Camp David,** citing an attack that killed several people, including a US soldier, a few days before the commemoration of the 11 September attacks. However, the media and analysts pointed out that internal divisions in the US government and the aforementioned obstacles were the real reasons for the

cancellation, rather than the attack, since a ceasefire had not been a US requirement at any time during the process and the negotiations had been carried out amid very high levels of violence.

After the cancellation, informal efforts and meetings continued and a Taliban delegation travelled to Pakistan, where it met with the US envoy for the peace process. Khalilzad also met with the Pakistani prime minister and the head of the Pakistani Armed Forces. Thus, some confidence-building measures took place, such as the release of 11 Taliban commanders from an Afghan prison in October and the release of three Taliban prisoners in exchange for the release of two foreign prisoners held by the Taliban, an American academic and another Australian kidnapped in 2016. The fact that the released prisoners belonged to the Haqqani network highlighted its strong influence on the Taliban beyond the political alliance between both insurgencies. In December, formal talks resumed in Doha, though an attack near the US base in Bagram led Khalilzad to announce a "brief pause" in the negotiations.

**The Intra-Afghan Dialogue and possible negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban insurgency did not occur at any time of the year, although both the government and the Taliban spoke about this issue on several occasions and even presented different proposals.** In February, there was a meeting in Moscow between a Taliban delegation and a delegation of Afghan politicians led by former President Hamid Karzai. Although the meeting took place without the participation of the Afghan government, it was widely perceived as part of the Intra-Afghan Dialogue, held alongside the negotiations with the US government. The first National Consultative Peace Meeting was held in the same month, in which a large national meeting was announced, which was postponed several times until a National Consultative Peace Jirga was held in late April with the participation of 3,200 people, but with glaring absences such as several presidential candidates, CEO Abdullah and the president of the High Peace Council, demonstrating the lack of unity among the political actors opposed to the Taliban insurgency. The *jirga* came shortly after an intra-organisational dialogue meeting that was due to take place in Doha in April and was suspended due to the imbalance between the delegations that were set to participate, with 25 Taliban representatives compared to 250 people representing different Afghan groups. Finally, this meeting, called the "Intra-Afghan Peace Conference", took place in July, in which the attendees (government representatives, opposition politicians, media figures, civil society activists and the Taliban) participated individually, given the Taliban's refusal to meet with the Afghan government. The conference was prepared jointly by Qatar and Germany. Although

the final resolution called for a reduction in violence, no possible ceasefire was included. In late July, the Afghan government announced that it was preparing the start of these negotiations with the Taliban within two weeks, but this was immediately denied by Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, who reiterated that the Intra-Afghan Dialogue would not take place until an agreement is made with the US government. The Afghan government had announced the appointment of a negotiating delegation and it had emerged that the talks could take place in Norway, which together with Germany may be trying to boost the intra-Afghan peace process alongside the talks with the United States.

***Women's organisations carried out multiple initiatives demanding to be included in the peace process between the US government and the Taliban insurgency***

## Gender, peace and security

Throughout the year, Afghan women's organisations unsuccessfully asked to participate significantly in the peace negotiations and complained that their rights were not a subject of discussion with the Taliban insurgency. However, different initiatives and events showed a greater ability to influence the process and the main actors than in previous periods. One of the main organisations, the Afghan Women's Network, issued a statement before the meeting in Moscow in February urging the inclusion of women at the table and arguing against the choice of peace over human rights, against any change in the political system and against the endangerment of legislation of the country (in reference to the Taliban's rejection of the Constitution), among other aspects. The Moscow meeting was attended by two women out of a total of 70 to 100 people. Meanwhile, the government team designated for future peace negotiations, announced in late 2018, was attended by three women out of a total of 12 members: Hasina Safi, the Minister of Information and Culture; Alema Alema, the Deputy Minister of Refugees and Repatriation; and Shah Gul Rezai, a former member of Parliament. In February, over 3,000 women gathered in Kabul for the event "Afghan Women's National Consensus for Peace", which was attended by women from all 34 provinces. The process began in 2018 with consultations with 15 women across the country and was co-organised by the Office of the First Lady, female members of the High Peace Council, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Afghan Women's Network, together with other civil society organisations. The event concluded with a positioning statement similar to the government's position regarding the need for intra-Afghan negotiations and critical of the participants' lack of representativeness and the difficulties in enjoying meaningful participation.

Meanwhile, a delegation of women tried to travel unsuccessfully to Qatar to coincide with the conclusion of the round of negotiations between the US and the Taliban between late February and mid-March. In April, the Taliban announced that their delegation in Qatar would include women, though without revealing their names. Furthermore, the Afghan Ambassador to the United Nations announced the formation of the "Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan" to ensure that women's rights are part of future peace negotiations with the Taliban. The group is made up of 20 countries with female ambassadors and deputy ambassadors such as the United States, France, Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. In terms of international support, a high-level United Nations delegation consisting of Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs and Peacebuilding Rosemary DiCarlo, UNFPA Executive Director Natalia Kanem and UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka made a visit to the country in July.

India (Nagaland)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, NSCN-IM, NNPG: GPRN/ NSCN (Kitovi Zhimomi), NNC, FGN, NSCN(R), NPGN (Non-Accord) and NNC/ GDRN/NA
<b>Third parties</b>	--
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Framework agreement (2015)
<b>Summary:</b>	
The Indian state of Nagaland has suffered armed conflict and a socio-political crisis since the 1950s as a result of much of the Naga population's unfulfilled aspiration to win independence and create a sovereign state. There have been different attempts at negotiation since the 1960s, but it was not until 1997 that a ceasefire agreement was reached with the NSCN-IM group, one of the main actors in the conflict. Although the agreement has remained in force to date, the negotiations have not made significant progress on the central issues. In 2012, however, the peace process received a boost from greater involvement from the Naga government and state MPs. Alongside the negotiations with the NSCN-IM, in 2001 the government reached another ceasefire agreement with the NSCN-K insurgent organisation. However, these negotiations have also failed to make significant progress. In 2015, the Government and the NSCN-IM reached a framework pre-agreement, considered a preamble to the final resolution of the conflict. However, that same year, the ceasefire agreement with the NSCN-K was broken, and violent clashes began again.	

**There was no progress in the peace process in Nagaland, despite several rounds of negotiations between the Indian government and the Naga insurgent groups and differences in position between various Naga actors were staged throughout the year.** In August, the governor of

Nagaland and negotiator in the peace talks on behalf of the government said that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had established that the negotiations should be finalised and an agreement reached within three months. However, in the months that followed, the armed groups made their disagreements evident in terms of signing the agreement. Moreover, the coordinating body known as the Naga National Political Groups (NNPG), which brings together seven insurgent organisations, approved signing the pact. However, the NSCN-IM group refused to sign it, putting the issue of a flag and a Constitution for the Naga people on the table. In fact, the leaders' disagreement over whether to sign the agreement led several of them to leave the NSCN-IM and join the NNPG. Some details of the framework agreement signed in 2015 emerged, whose contents had been kept secret, such as that the Naga leadership would have accepted to remain in the Indian union. However, it should be noted that during 2019, all Naga insurgent groups were represented at the negotiating table, since the NSCN-K faction representing the Nagas of India was integrated into the NNPG as the NSCN-Khango Konyak in January to participate in the peace negotiations, following the announcement made in this regard in 2018. Therefore, the NSCN-K was only joined by Nagas from Myanmar. In addition, the armed group ZUF also joined the NNPG, representing the Zeliangrong population, one of the Naga tribes spread across Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

***Despite the ultimatum imposed by the Indian government, no peace agreement was signed in Nagaland***

Two rounds of negotiations were held in October that were considered to be of great importance since the deadline set by Modi ended on 31 October, in which no agreement was reached. After the deadline set by the government expired, the Interior Minister said that great progress had been made in the peace process and that meetings would be held with all the stakeholders involved prior to any agreement, including the governments of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur, given the tension that the possibility of an agreement in Nagaland generates in neighbouring states with Naga populations. Alongside the negotiations with the armed groups, Ravi met with representatives of the 14 Naga tribes and non-Naga communities to convey that the government may be willing to sign an agreement that excluded the NSCN-IM. The Naga Hoho, a traditional institution that brings together all Naga tribes, called for all insurgent groups to unite to facilitate a peaceful agreement.

## Gender, peace and security

Regarding the gender, peace and security agenda and the participation of women in peace negotiations, it should be noted that they continued to be excluded from formal participation spaces, as well as from the institutional policy of the state in general, which

still did not have any women in the Naga legislative assembly. However, civil society women's organisations became involved in the peace process with different initiatives. In November, a group of representatives of the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) moved to Manipur to meet with the Manipur Meira Paibi women's organisation. The objective of the meeting was to address the tensions that could arise between the populations of both states before the potential signing of a peace agreement in Nagaland, given the Meitei population of Manipur's rejection of any agreement including the Naga population of Manipur that could lead to territorial or administrative changes in the state. The meeting also addressed problems common to women of the two states, such as strong militarisation.

## South-east Asia and Oceania

Myanmar	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, armed signatory groups of the cease fire agreement (NCA): DKBA, RCSS/SSA-South, CNF, KNU,KNLAPC, ALP, PNLO, ABSDF, NMSP and LDU; armed groups not part of the: UWSP, NDAA, SSPP/SSA-N, KNPP, NSCN-K, KIA, AA, TNLA, MNDAA
<b>Third parties</b>	China
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (October 2015)

### Summary:

Since the armed conflict between the Armed Forces of Myanmar and ethnic-based insurgent groups began in 1948, several negotiations have taken place in an attempt to end the violence. Beginning in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, many armed groups have reached ceasefire agreements with the Burmese Government. Although definitive peace agreements were never reached, violence did decrease significantly as a result of these pacts. In 2011 there was a change in the Administration as a result of the 2010 elections and the new Government made several overtures to the armed insurgency that brought about the start of peace negotiations and the signing of agreements with most of the armed groups operating in different parts of the country. By mid-2012 the Government had signed a ceasefire agreement with 12 insurgent organizations. In 2013, talks began with different insurgent groups aimed at reaching a nationwide ceasefire agreement and promoting political talks. In 2015, the government and eight armed opposition groups signed a ceasefire agreement (NCA), taking the first steps towards political dialogue. In 2016, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi convened the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong, which brought the government together with the armed opposition groups, beginning a new phase in the peace process. The conference has been convened several times in subsequent years.

**There were no formal sessions of the peace process between the government of Myanmar and the different**

**insurgent organisations operating in the country in 2019, though informal meetings did take place both with the armed groups that have signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) and with various groups that have not officially signed it.** Regarding negotiations with the groups that have signed the NCA, the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong had not resumed since October 2018. Even though the authorities announced that formal talks would resume at various times of the year, no formal meeting was expected until January 2020.

In March, the peace process steering team (PPST) representing the insurgent groups that have signed the NCA announced a change in its internal leadership to support the negotiations. A new meeting of the armed groups took place in May in which the KNU announced its intention to leave the PPST, proposing the establishment of a new cooperation framework for the insurgent groups. In August, a PPST meeting was held in Thailand where the insurgents decided to resume peace talks with the government through the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in meetings with one team to address military issues and other team to tackle political affairs. These meetings would aim to boost the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong, which has been deadlocked since 2018. In turn, the government announced the formation of a Peace Secretariat to carry out peace negotiations with the groups that have and have not signed the NCA. Prior to the meeting of the armed groups in Thailand, the government had met informally with the KNU and the RCSS separately, as it had been doing since November 2018, to present their proposal to promote the peace process, with negotiations for more robust implementation of the ceasefire, as well as a framework for political dialogue during 2020 and beyond. In fact, the KNU's leaders met with the head of the Burmese Armed Forces in Yangon in March in a meeting that was described as informal, but also of great importance since the KNU is the only armed group that has direct contact with the chief of the Burmese Armed Forces. In December, the 10 armed groups met again, achieving the terms of reference to form a new organisation bringing together the insurgencies that have signed the NCA, a government proposal to agree on a date for a Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting, the strengthening of the negotiating team and other aspects. The Peace Commission indicated that armed groups that have signed the NCA should obtain permission from the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre to request financial assistance from international donors, noting that the government's intention was not to restrict access to funds for development, but to understand what projects were being financed.

***China played a major role in the peace process in Myanmar, in keeping with its greater economic influence in the country***

Bilateral meetings with groups that have not signed the NCA, were repeated throughout the year (in January, for example, the government met in Thailand with the KNPP and the KIA), but the government also agreed to negotiate jointly with the armed groups that make up the Northern Alliance (KIA, MNDAA, TNLA and AA). In a meeting with the KIA in China, it was agreed that the meetings would also include the MNDAA, the TNLA and the AA, with which no negotiations had previously been conducted. These groups are involved in the main fighting with the Burmese Armed Forces.<sup>2</sup> In the first meeting between the government and the insurgency in late February in China, the Northern Alliance proposed a bilateral ceasefire as a previous step to signing the NCA. In April and July, new meetings were held between the Northern Alliance and the government's Peace Commission, during which both parties shared drafts of bilateral ceasefire agreements. Alongside these meetings, the government met in March in Naypyitaw with eight groups (AA, UWSP, KIO, PSC, SSPP, MNTJP, PSLF and KNPP) with which it agreed to hold frequent meetings to resolve their political differences and put an end to the armed conflict, in what was the government's first invitation to participate in a group discussion. As a result of this meeting, in April, the Burmese Armed Forces announced a two-month extension to the unilateral ceasefire of December 2018 in Shan State and Kachin State, which was subsequently extended again as part of the meetings with the Northern Alliance. However, the process with the insurgent groups was partially stalled by the issue of arrest warrants against AA leaders and by armed groups' allegations of ceasefire violations committed by the Burmese Armed Forces, though in September the armed groups AA, TNLA and MNDAA, known collectively as the Brotherhood Alliance, which is in turn part of the Northern Alliance, announced a one-year ceasefire. However, breaches in the ceasefire prompted the Burmese Armed Forces to conclude that the armed groups had no interest in signing the NCA and ended the ceasefire initiated in 2018. The Naga armed group NSCN-K, which operates in India and Myanmar, announced that it had no intention of signing the NCA.

China's role in the peace process grew alongside its greater influence in the country's economic sphere. At various times of the year, Chinese authorities turned to insurgent groups to boost the process. Thus, in January a meeting was held between China's Special Envoy for Asian Affairs and leaders of the armed groups that make up the Northern Alliance at the headquarters of the KIA that addressed stability in the border area and participation in peace negotiations with the government. In August, China urged the TNLA, AA and MNDAA to end their armed clashes in Shan State.

2. See the summary on the armed conflict in Myanmar in Escola de Cultura de Pau, Alert 2020! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding. Barcelona: Icaria, 2020.



## Gender, peace and security

In line with the deadlock in the peace negotiations, there was also no significant progress in women's participation and the inclusion of gender equality in the process. Different civil society initiatives took place during the year to strengthen the participation of women's organisations. Thus, with support from the Carter Center, the Women's League of Burma published the report *Broadening Participation of Women of Ethnic Political Parties in the Peace Process*, the outcome of the consultation process carried out both with political representatives and with different women's organisations, discussing needs and recommendations for increasing female participation. UN Women also promoted different events to facilitate the implementation of Resolution 1325 and the women, peace and security agenda. These events were attended by women's organisations and representatives in different parts of the country. In September, the Women's League of Burma convened the Women's Forum for Peace 2019, which was attended by 300 women from across the country. Among other issues, the attendees discussed a possible National Action Plan for Resolution 1325.

Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government of Papua New Guinea, government of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville
<b>Third parties</b>	UN, Conciliation Resources
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Bougainville Peace Agreement (2001)

### Summary:

The armed conflict between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (1988-1998), which some sources consider to have been the deadliest in Oceania since the Second World War, ended with a cessation of hostilities in 1998 and the signing of a peace agreement in 2001 in Arawa (the largest city in Bougainville). Among other matters, the agreement provided for the establishment of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARB), the disarmament and demobilisation of combatants and the holding of a non-binding independence referendum within a maximum period of 15 years after the election of the first ARB government, which finally took place in 2005. After several years of negotiations between the national and regional governments, in 2018 the Agreement's Joint Supervisory Body created the Post-Referendum Planning Working Group and former Irish President Bertie Ahern was elected chair of the Bougainville Referendum Commission, making him responsible for preparing the census and other logistical preparations for the referendum. After several delays, the referendum was finally held between 23 November and 7 December 2019, with a binary question in which voters could choose between greater autonomy or independence for the region.

**Following the self-determination referendum in November and December, the governments of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville expressed their respect for the outcome of the vote and showed their willingness to enter into**

**negotiations to address the political status of the Bougainville region, in line with the provisions laid down in the 2001 peace agreement.** In the aforementioned referendum, in which a binary question was raised between greater autonomy and independence, the option of independence obtained more than 98% support with over 87% turnout. According to the Bougainville Referendum Commission, the referendum was conducted peacefully and without any serious impact. In the months prior to the vote, in addition to the commission's logistical preparations, the Post-Referendum Planning Working Group had met on several occasions, which is co-chaired by the Minister of Bougainville Affairs of the national government of Papua New Guinea and by the Minister for Implementation of the Peace Agreement of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Created in mid-2018, this body is charged with designing a road map shared between the two governments on the negotiations that should follow the referendum. According to the 2001 peace agreement, the referendum is not binding, so the Parliament of Papua New Guinea will make the final decision on the political status of Bougainville. The sessions of the Post-Referendum Planning Working Group are technically supported and facilitated by the Mediation Support Unit (of the Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding and the Department of Peace Operations) and by the British NGO Conciliation Resources. They also enjoy logistical and economic support from UNDP and the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund.

After the results of the referendum were made public, the president of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, John Momis, expressed his satisfaction about the massive support for the independence of the island, recognised the complexity of the negotiating process that began at the end of the year and expressed his wish that the proposals that arose during it were mutually acceptable to both parties. Momis also announced his willingness to convene the Bougainville Consultation Forum so that public authorities and organised civil society could jointly design the future negotiating strategy of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. According to some analysts, the aforementioned negotiations could go on for years. Momis promised that the results and conclusions of the forum's discussions will guide the strategy of the Bougainville negotiating team. Moreover, the government of Papua New Guinea said it respected the results of the referendum, voiced its desire to do everything possible to maintain Papua New Guinea's sovereignty over the island and recalled that the 2001 peace agreement does not set a specific timetable for the post-referendum negotiations, which some analysts think should lead to a joint proposal made by both governments that would be put to a vote in the Parliament of Papua New Guinea.

## Gender, peace and security

In November, the president of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, John Momis, declared his intention to

form a negotiating team representing women and other groups, such as churches, businesses, the diaspora and war veterans. Several women played a leading role in the negotiations that led to the 2001 peace agreement, such as Josephine Kauona, the founder and president of the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom, and Ruby Mirinka, who read a statement from the women during the signing of the peace agreement. In addition, during the year there were demonstrations led by women's organisations to demand respect for women's human rights before, during and after the referendum.

Philippines (MILF)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, MILF
<b>Third parties</b>	Malaysia, International Contact Group, Third-Party Monitoring Team, International Monitoring Team, Independent Decommissioning Body
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Agreement for General Cessation of Hostilities (1997), Agreement on Peace between the Government and the MILF (2001), Mutual Cessation of Hostilities (2003), Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2012), Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2014), Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (2018)

#### Summary:

Peace negotiations between the Government and the MILF, an MNLF splinter group, started in 1997, just months after Fidel Ramos's Administration had signed a peace agreement with the MNLF. Since then, the negotiating process has been interrupted three times (in 2000, 2003 and 2008) by outbreaks of high intensity violence. Despite this, in the over 30 rounds of talks that have taken place since the late 1990s some agreements on security and development have been reached, as well as a ceasefire agreement that has been upheld, for the most part. In October 2012 both parties signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro and in March 2014 the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, which plans to replace the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao with a new public body (called Bangsamoro) with a larger territorial scope and broader self-government competences. Since 2014, the peace process has been focused on the drafting and congressional approval of the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which incorporates the main contents of the two aforementioned peace agreements and was approved by Congress in 2018. Following its ratification in a plebiscite in early 2019, the peace process has hinged on the implementation of the peace agreements, the institutional development of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (governed temporarily by the leader of the MILF) and the disarmament of the MILF.

**After the celebration early in the year of the plebiscite in which the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was ratified, the peace process hinged mainly on the implementation of the 2014 peace agreement, and especially on the establishment of a new autonomous regime and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of many MILF troops.** In the first round of the aforementioned plebiscite, which took place on 21 January, the vast

majority of the population (more than 88%, or 1.7 million people) approved the BOL and, therefore, the replacement of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) by the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). In this first round, the inhabitants of the now extinct ARMM and the cities of Cotabato and Isabela voted, but most of the population in Isabela decided not to join the BARMM. In the second round of the plebiscite, which took place on 6 February, several territories adjacent to the ARMM spoke of their inclusion in the new BARMM. Sixty-three (63) of the 67 barangays (towns) of the province of North Cotabato voted in favour, as did the six cities of the province of Lanao del Norte, but these cities did not join the BARMM because the whole of the Catholic-majority province of Lanao del Norte voted against it. The fact that the MILF has a large presence in some of the cities that voted unsuccessfully to join the BARMM put the government on alert for possible tension and outbreaks of violence.

Also in February, President Rodrigo Duterte presided over the inaugural ceremony of the 80 people who will make up the Bangsamoro Transition Authority in (BTA), the body responsible for governing the BARMM until the elections in June 2022. The MILF appointed 41 members of the BTA and the government appointed the other 39. The historical leader of the MILF, Murad Ebrahim, will temporarily lead the new government for approximately three and a half years. As laid out in the 2014 peace agreement, the new BARMM will have a greater geographical scope, broader powers and a better financing system than the old BARMM. The new autonomous government, the BTA, held its first session on 29 March. In May, it received the Transition Plan from the government and the MILF's peace agreement implementation panels. A kind of road map to guide the transition from the ARMM to the BARMM, the Transition Plan addresses some legislative and government action priorities in areas such as education, governance, valuation, services and public service. In December, the body responsible for resolving disputes between the national government and the BTA met for the first time to agree on the terms of reference.

The other area where significant progress was made during the year, in accordance with the provisions of the peace agreement, was in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of MILF combatants. In the middle of the year, several meetings were held and field visits were made to transform the six MILF camps into civilian communities. Similarly, **in September, the second phase of demobilisation of 12,000 or 30% of the approximately 40,000 MILF combatants began** and over 2,000 weapons were surrendered. This phase should end in April 2020. By late December, around 9,000 fighters had turned in their weapons. In the next phase, another 35% of the combatants should demobilise once the BARMM police force has been established. The remaining 30% should demobilise once an exit or termination agreement is signed by which both parties

consider the peace agreement implemented, supposedly in 2022. By November, about 7,000 combatants had already demobilised. The entire process is being supervised by the Independent Decommissioning Body, created by the two implementation panels and made up of representatives from Turkey, Norway, Brunei and the Philippines. Prior to the start of the process, the government had approved a package of aid measures for the reintegration of former combatants, while Congress discussed an amnesty framework that should cover the vast majority of the former combatants. The government also requested that MILF commanders facing prosecution not be proposed as members of the new Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

Finally, **the government and the MILF's implementation panels, led respectively by Gloria Jumamil Mercado (who is also the undersecretary of the OPAPP) and Mohagher Iqbal (historically the chief negotiator of the MILF and later the head of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission), continued to meet regularly throughout the year.** The first meeting following the ratification of the BOL took place in Kuala Lumpur under the auspices of the Malaysian government, which facilitated the peace negotiations. During the meeting, both parties committed themselves to the full implementation of the peace agreement, ratified all agreements signed since 2016, renewed the mandate of the International Monitoring Team and the Ad-Hoc Joint Action Group and pledged to jointly develop a road map on transitional justice and reconciliation, one of the key aspects of the 2014 peace agreement.

## Gender, peace and security

As part of the implementation of the peace agreement and the development of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in the Muslim Mindanao, 12 women (16% out of a total of 75 members) were appointed to the BTA, the interim government that will rule the autonomous region until 2022. Eleven of the 12 women are Muslim. Five were appointed by the MILF and the other seven were named by the government. Four of these 12 women will hold key positions in the new regional structure: two in the government (in the Ministries of Social Services and Science and Technology, respectively), one as the minority leader in Parliament and another as chair of the Regional Commission on Bangsamoro Women, a body responsible for promoting women's empowerment and gender equity policies. This agency will be chaired by Hadja Bainon Guiabar Karon, who has been a member of the MNLF Central Committee, a minister and deputy governor of the ARMM and is currently president of the Federation of United Mindanawan Bangsamoro Women and the Women's Organisation Movement in the Bangsamoro (WOMB). During the year, there was some criticism due the fact that none of the three members representing the indigenous peoples (Lumad) in the BTA are women. Law 1154 (which creates the BARMM) stipulates that women must be represented in the

government and in the Commission of Senior Citizens (which advises the Chief Minister of the BARMM) and also establishes that Parliament must pass laws that protect the rights of women and recognise their role in national construction and regional development processes.

Philippines (MNLF)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, MNLF (faction led by Nur Misuari)
<b>Third parties</b>	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Tripoli Agreement (1976), Final Peace Agreement (1996)

### Summary:

After five years of high intensity armed hostilities between the Government and the MNLF, both parties signed a peace agreement in 1976 in Tripoli under the auspices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which, shortly before, had recognized the MNLF as the legitimate representative of the Moro people. However, the unilateral implementation of this agreement by the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos caused the armed conflict to re-ignite. After the fall of Marcos and the recovery of democracy in 1986, peace negotiations resumed and in 1996 a new peace agreement was reached for the full implementation of the 1976 Tripoli agreement. Nevertheless, both the MNLF and the OIC considered there were substantial elements of the new peace agreement that had not been implemented, so since the year 2007 a tripartite process to revise the peace agreement started. Despite the advances achieved with that process (the so-called '42 points of consensus'), the attack launched by the MNLF on the town of Zamboanga in September 2013, the search and arrest warrant against the founder of the MNLF, Nur Misuari, the criticism by the MNLF of the peace agreement signed by the Government and the MILF in March 2014 and the differing interpretations between the Government and the MNLF on the conclusion or not of the revision of the agreement led the peace negotiations to a standstill at the end of 2013. With Rodrigo Duterte arriving in power in mid 2016, the conversations resumed with Nur Misuari, who was granted a temporary judicial permit for this purpose. Nevertheless, the majority faction of the MNLF decided to include the main demands of the MNLF in the peace process with the MILF, which led to three of its representatives being included into the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, in charge of drafting the Bangsamoro Basic Law (a new political entity foreseen in the 2014 peace agreement with the MILF and which should replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao).

**During the year, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and the founder of the MNLF, Nur Misuari, met six times to discuss the process of reviewing implementation of the 1996 peace agreement between the government and the MNLF and also to discuss how the MNLF fits into the new regional structure established after the ratification by plebiscite of the Bangsamoro Organic Law, which creates the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, replacing the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, of which Misuari was governor. In August, Duterte suggested the creation of a joint panel or committee run by the government and the MNLF to address these and other issues, such as peace in Sulu and the MNLF's role in fighting armed groups such**

as Abu Sayyaf. This coordination committee should also serve to address the discomfort that certain MNLF groups loyal to Misuari have felt regarding the creation of an autonomous structure (the BARMM) replacing another (the ARMM) that emerged under the 1996 peace agreement. In recent years, the Duterte administration has explicitly discussed its intention to try to harmonise the parallel peace processes run between the MNLF and the MILF, as well as to reconcile implementation of the 2014 peace agreement with the MILF with the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF. However, by late 2019, the formula proposed by the government for this purpose had not yet been revealed. In this regard, after a meeting held by Duterte and Misuari in the presidential palace, Duterte asked Minister of the Interior Eduardo Año and Minister of Defence Delfin Lorenzana to prepare a draft agreement with the MNLF so that it could be discussed in December as part of the new coordination committee between both parties. On behalf of the government, the panel would be composed of Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo, the Presidential Advisor for the Peace Process, Carlito Gálvez, the director of the National Security Council, Hermogenes Esperon, and someone from the Department of Foreign Affairs. By the end of the year, the contents of the agreement that Duterte had requested were still undisclosed, but it should be remembered that the review process of the 1996 peace agreement between the government, the MNLF and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) ended in 2016, after eight years of negotiations, with several agreements, such as the establishment of a Bangsamoro development fund, the joint management of strategic minerals and more political participation for the MNLF. In this regard, it should be noted that **while the MNLF factions loyal to Misuari have been very critical of the 2014 peace agreement between the government and the MILF, other factions of the group, such as the one led by Jikiri, have participated in both the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (responsible for drafting the Bangsamoro Organic Law) and the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, which will govern the new BARMM until mid-2022. In the middle of the year, as part of one of the meetings between Duterte and Misuari, the latter called for the inclusion of the OIC in negotiations with the government. The OIC has recognised the MNLF as the legitimate representative of the Moro people and Nur Misuari has regularly participated in its summits in recent years. Despite the charges he is facing (due to corruption and the siege of the city of Zamboanga in 2013), Misuari travelled to Abu Dhabi and Morocco to participate in two OIC summits in 2019.**

***Although the Philippine government dismantled its negotiating panel and suspended the two agreements signed at the start of the peace process with the NDF, at the end of the year it emerged that the negotiations could be resumed in early 2020***

#### Philippines (NDF)

<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, NDF (umbrella organisation of various communist organisations, including the Communist Party of the Philippines, which is the political wing of the NPA)
<b>Third parties</b>	Norway
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	The Hague Joint Declaration (1992), Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (1995), Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (1998)

#### Summary:

Negotiations between the Government and the NDF began in 1986, after the fall of Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship. Since then, many rounds of negotiations have taken place, but agreement has only been reached on one of the four items listed in the substantive negotiation agenda of The Hague Joint Declaration of 1992, namely human rights and international humanitarian law (an agreement was signed in 1998). No agreement has been reached on the other three items: socio-economic reforms; political and constitutional reforms; and cessation of hostilities and disposition of armed forces. Since 2004, the Government of Norway has been acting as a facilitator between the Government and the NDF, the political organisation that represents the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing (the NPA) in the peace talks. In addition to the significant differences that exist between the Government and the NDF with regard to which socio-economic and political model is best for the Philippines, one of the issues that has generated the greatest controversy between the parties in recent years is that of the security and immunity guarantees for the NDF members involved in the peace negotiations.

**Like the previous year, the formal peace negotiations remained deadlocked and even the government formally dismantled its negotiating panel, but at the end of the year both parties publicly declared their willingness to**

**resume the negotiating process.** In January and February, both President Rodrigo Duterte and several senior government officials and military officers said they were willing to resume the talks as long as the NPA ended its offensive armed actions and extortion. The negotiations would be held in the Philippines. In January, there was even speculation about the possibility (though it was not finally confirmed) that Duterte had ordered the start of secret talks with the founder of the NPA, Jose Maria Sison. The NDF also expressed its desire to resume the negotiations, though it indicated that Duterte was responsible for taking the initiative, since it was he who formally terminated the peace negotiations in November 2017 and urged the judiciary to

list the NPA and the Communist Party of the Philippines as terrorist organisations. However, in the end **not only did the talks fail to resume, but after accusing the NDF of a lack of sincerity regarding the negotiations and of**



using them to reinforce itself militarily, in late March the government dismantled its negotiating panel and suspended the two agreements signed in the beginning of the peace process in the 1990s (the Hague Joint Declaration of 1992 and the Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law of 1998). The Office of the Presidential Advisor for Peace, Reconciliation and Unity, formerly known as the Office of the Presidential Advisor for the Peace Process, though the old acronym OPAPP remains, also announced its intention to strengthen the localised peace negotiations in line with Manila's new strategy to manage the conflict that it made public in December 2018, popularly known as the "Comprehensive approach of the entire nation to achieve an inclusive and lasting peace". According to the OPAPP, the new strategy required much greater participation by local government units. The NDF blasted the government's decision and strongly opposed local peace negotiations because it considered that the improvement of the welfare and development conditions of the population should be addressed through nationwide political, social and social reforms and not through conversations with local NPA units that only covered demobilisation and reintegration programmes for combatants, according to the NDF.

The peace process remained stagnant until December, when Duterte publicly stated that he had asked Silvestre Bello III, the Secretary of Labour and head of the government's negotiating panel until March, to hold exploratory talks with Jose Maria Sison to discuss possibly resuming the talks. In fact, Bello said he had recently been holding these types of conversations with NDF leaders, even when official negotiations were formally suspended. Along these lines, on 7 and 8 December there was a meeting between Bello, the NDF (Sison and the negotiating panel) and a representative of the government of Norway, which has been in charge of facilitating the talks for years. Bello declined to provide details on the contents of the meeting, but was relatively optimistic about the possibility of resuming negotiations in early 2020 and said the NDF had agreed with 90% of the government's proposal, which includes holding negotiations in the Philippines and the establishment of a cessation of hostilities agreement while they take place. **The NDF appreciated the president's gesture and once again declared its willingness to resume the negotiations, but said that it was unacceptable that they take place in the Philippines, both due to security reasons for the negotiating panel and to the fact that the joint agreement on security and immunity guarantees states that negotiations must take place in a neutral country.** Sison also urged Duterte to reaffirm his commitment to the agreements previously signed by both parties, to put an end to repressive action and to resume the interim peace agreement, whose fundamental aspects included a general amnesty, a cessation of hostilities and economic and social reforms, and on which there was a basis for agreement after several rounds of discrete and preliminary

negotiations during 2018. At the end of the year, the government responded to the NDF's refusal to resume the talks in the Philippines, offering security guarantees and striking all criminal charges pending against the members of the NDF's negotiating panel while the negotiations took place. As usual, at the end of December the NDF announced a cessation of hostilities between 23 December and 7 January to mark the Christmas holidays, a gesture that was immediately seconded by the government. Also in late December, Manila announced the reconstitution of its negotiating panel and the inclusion therein of Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, who according to various media outlets is very close to Duterte. At the end of the year, it was not clear whether the former members of the negotiating panel, including its chief Silvestre Bello III, would continue to be part of it. The NDF welcomed both the appointment of Medialdea and the cessation of hostilities agreed by the parties. In addition, **Sison told the press that a meeting could be held in the second or third week of January 2020 to formalise the resumption of the negotiations.**

## Gender, peace and security

During the year, several women's organisations participated in various demonstrations to demand the resumption of peace negotiations between the government and the NDF. Special mention should be made of the 6 March celebration in Manila of the National Peace Forum, co-organised by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the Centre for Peace Education (CPE) at Miriam College and Young Women for Peace and Leadership (YWPL) for the purpose of discussing mechanisms for the participation of women (and other groups such as young people, indigenous people and the LGBTI community) in negotiations between the government and the NDF.

Thailand (south)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, MARA Patani (umbrella organisation representing several armed groups)
<b>Third parties</b>	Malaysia
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	--

### Summary:

Since 2004, the year when the armed conflict in the south of Thailand reignited, several discreet and exploratory informal conversations have taken place between the Thai government and the insurgent group. Some of these dialogue initiatives have been led by non-government organizations, by the Indonesian government or by former senior officials of the Thai State. After around one year of exploratory contacts between the Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and some insurgent groups, at the start of 2013, formal and public conversations started between the Government and the armed group BRN, facilitated by the Government of Malaysia. These negotiations were interrupted by the coup

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d'état in March 2014, but the military government in power since then resumed its contacts with several insurgent groups towards the second half of the year. In 2015 negotiations between the Government and MARA Patani –an organization grouping the main insurgent groups in the south of the country– were made public. Although the insurgency wanted to discuss measures that might resolve the central points of the conflict (such as recognizing the distinct identity of the Patani people or granting some level of self-government to the provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat), the main point discussed during the initial stages of the process was the establishment of several security areas to reduce the level of violence and thus determine the level of representativeness of MARA Patani and the commitment of insurgent groups (especially the BRN) with the process of dialogue.

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**Although some progress was reported in January, the official negotiations remained deadlocked after MARA Patani left the negotiating table in early February.**

According to some analysts, the main causes of this paralysis were the elections held in March (the first since the coup d'état of 2014) and delays in the formation of a new government, as well as the government's intention to change the format of the peace process and talk directly with the BRN, the most militarily active group, which according to some media boasts around 8,000 members. Although the BRN was formally represented by MARA Patani, both the government and many analysts believe that such representation did not reflect the BRN's political will to participate in the peace negotiations that began in 2015. Thus, for much of these negotiations, the government required MARA Patani to demonstrate its ability to control and influence operational cells in the field. During the first meeting that took place on 4 January between the government's negotiating delegation and the new facilitator of the negotiations, Tan Sri Abdul Rahim bin Mohammed Noor, the former chief of the Malaysian police, appointed in August 2018 after Mahatir's election as Malaysian prime minister, he confirmed having contacted the BRN directly, though he acknowledged that the talks had been preliminary. Shortly before, the new chief negotiator of the government, General Udomchai Thammasarorat, appointed to replace General Aksara Kerdpol in October 2018, had expressed his intention to reformulate the format of the negotiations and had even urged Malaysia to invite the leader of the supreme council of the BRN, Doonloh Wae-mano (aka Abdullah Wan Mat Noor) to the negotiations.

Although some progress was made early in the year, such as the fact that the government stated it was available to discuss models of greater decentralisation or autonomy for the first time, in early February the formal peace negotiations were interrupted and did not resume throughout the year. Following Udomchai

*Although the formal peace negotiations between the Thai government and MARA Patani were deadlocked throughout the year, direct meetings took place between Bangkok and the BRN, the most active armed group in the south of the country*

Thammasarorat's decision not to attend a meeting between both delegations organised by the Malaysian government in Kuala Lumpur, alleging that he would only meet individually and separately with the head of the MARA Patani delegation, Sukrai Hari, on 3 February, MARA Patani issued a statement announcing its decision to leave the negotiations until after the general elections scheduled for 24 March. In its statement, MARA Patani criticised Udomchai's attitude, blasted what it claimed was a hidden agenda and asked for him to be replaced as the government's chief negotiator. In May, Sukrai Hari announced his resignation as chief negotiator of MARA Patani for medical reasons, although some analysts suggested other possible causes, such as internal rivalries within MARA Patani. Later, Sukrai Hari, who had led the insurgent delegation since 2015, denounced that the lack of progress in that period had mainly been attributable to the government's lack of sincerity and political will, warning that Bangkok did not want to sign any of the commitments made at the negotiating table and stating that the ultimate intention of the dialogue process was to save time for the Military Junta that ruled the country since 2014. Along the same lines, in July MARA Patani published a letter addressed to several stakeholders of the international community (such as the prime ministers of Thailand and Malaysia, the secretaries-general of the UN, the OIC and ASEAN, the Human Rights Commission and organisations such as Amnesty International and Geneva Call) that denounced Bangkok's lack of commitment to address a political solution to the armed conflict, claimed the right of self-determination for the Patani people and signalled that the conflict was no longer just an internal issue but also a regional or international one, so it urged the international community to get involved in solving it.

**Although the formal peace negotiations did not resume during the year, in mid-August a secret meeting between the government and the BRN was leaked to the media during which, according to some outlets, the rebels raised their demands, including**

the release of everyone accused of having links to the insurgent movement and the promotion of a transparent investigation into alleged human rights violations by state security forces and bodies. After carrying out a visit to the south of the country where he met with the government and with community and religious leaders in June, Abdul Rahim Noor declared the possibility of an imminent resumption of negotiations in the Malaysian town of Penang, though finally this did not come to pass. Finally, on 1 October, General Wanlop Rugsanaoh, who until then had been the head of the National Security Council, took office as the new chief negotiator for the government, replacing Udomchai Thammasarorat. In his first statement, Wanlop

Rugsanaoh confirmed the government's willingness to resume a peace process that included the BRN. Even after it allegedly carried out the most virulent attack in recent years in mid-November (killing 15 people), the government publicly maintained its intention to resume talks with the insurgent movement by 2020. These statements did not receive a reply from MARA Patani or the BRN, but **in early December a direct meeting between representatives of the government and the BRN in Berlin, sponsored and facilitated by an international organisation**, was reported by the media. Though the details of the meeting were not

made public, it was preceded by a series of informal and discreet contacts and conversations between both parties. The Malaysian government acknowledged having been informed of the aforementioned meeting by Bangkok. In this regard, although the Malaysian team to facilitate the negotiations stated that it did not recognise the participation of any other international third party in the peace process, it did welcome the possible addition of the BRN to the negotiations. According to some sources close to the talks, this time the BRN members present at the negotiations were directly able to decide on the group's armed operations.

